THE LATE ROBERT ABRAHAM, ESQ. F.S.A.

It is due to the memory of a gentleman who has been constantly occupied in the architectural profession for more than half a century, that something more than the mere "visit et obiit" of a monumental tablet should be preserved of his works and times,—and though an architect's memoir may be best read in his works, it is pleasing and instructive to have a slight sketch of the man also placed before us.

Mr. Abraham was the son of a builder, and entered the profession above sixty years ago as a pupil in the office of Mr. Bowen, a surveyor. At that time, as lately stated by the Chairman of the Architects' Benevolent Institution, there were not more than twelve architects in London, and with the exception of works carried on by Government, which were executed under the direction of appointed architects, nearly all matters connected with building in London were effected and carried out by the builders themselves without professional control. Contracts were then unheard of; and the system known as "measure and value" was then the sole method by which the value of works was ascertained. The number of persons, however, employed in working this system was at that time so small as almost to cause a monopoly, and those therefore who were engaged in it obtained, by constant employment, a thorough practical knowledge of the detail of building. These were the days when those interminable and monotonous lines of red brick barrack-looking houses arose, built in conformity with "the 14th of George the Third, commonly called the Building Act," covering the Bedford estate around Russell and Bedford squares, and the outskirts of the suburban parishes of St. Pancras and Marylebone. The bricklayer worked in exchange with the carpenter, and the plasterer in exchange with the mason. It was a system of barter, and the surveyor was employed to measure and adjust the accounts between the parties. Few were more actively engaged in this branch of business than Mr. Abraham in his earlier years. It was a bad school for architectural taste, but at a time when the nation was almost overwhelmed in war and cared little about such taste, it was, with the exception of the offices of the Government architects, such as Soane's, Wyatt's, Smirke's, &c., the best school to be had.

At the conclusion of the war, when greater opportunity was afforded for the exercise of architectural knowledge, and when an impetus to architecture was given by Nash in his valuable projected plans for the improvement of London, Mr. Abraham, by his industry, experience, and talent, had placed himself in a high position, and was well able to take advantage of one of those fortunate occasions which it is said occur to every man once in his life, and to catch the tide which bears on to honour and prosperity. It gave him the introduction to some of the chief Roman Catholic families in England, and much valuable private connection. From this time he carried on an extensive practice in architecture, and among his works may be mentioned the County Fire Office; Mr. Carbonell's premises in Regent-street; the Conservatories and Garden Buildings for the late Earl of Shrewsbury, at Alton Towers; the works at Arundel Castle, Worksop, Farnham, and Norfolk House, for the Duke of Norfolk; the Synagogue, near the Haymarket; the Westminster Bridewell; the Houses on the Brewers' Estate, in Oxford-street, and numerous works for private individuals. If in these works we do not perceive the hand of the artist architect, giving individual character, and impressing his own feelings on each line and detail, we see in all the exercise of much judgment, a great appropriation and fitness of purpose, and an economic use of material with great solidity of construction.

From the knowledge which his early practice gave him of builders' accounts and value of work, he was also extensively engaged in references and arbitrations. Living at that transition period between "measure and value" and "contract," these cases of disputed accounts were then more numerous, and caused more elaborate investigation, even for minor buildings, than now occur for buildings of the greatest magnitude. The opinion of Mr. Abraham, in such cases, was highly valued, and his co-operation sought for, while his good temper and sunny cheerfulness of disposition tended materially to soothe, and often to overcome, apparently implacable resentments between hostile parties.

Mr. Abraham never held any public appointment, though he contested the appointment for the district surveyorship of St. Pancras, when Mr. Baker was elected by a small majority.

He brought up in his office many pupils and students for architectural fame, and there were, and perhaps are now, few offices in which they could better learn the general practice of the profession. In his office there was no reserve, no dull plodding at mere copying, no professional secrets, no jealousy of a youngster's progress in knowledge; the whole business of the office was thrown unreservedly open to him, in-door and out-door alike. Every opportunity which an extensive practice afforded for seeing the detail of works was freely given, and the pupil, by being early thrown upon his own resources, acquired confidence and experience. The more he exerted himself and relieved the master, the greater satisfaction was given.*

To look forward to a fifty years' busy engagement in life, depending only on determined industry and integrity for a livelihood in a professional career, is an anxious and doubtful prospect: to look back on the same period and to see trials and difficulties surmounted; to have been able to retain the affectionate esteem of friends with whom one has started in life; to have obtained the personal friendship of clients; to have passed with unimpeached integrity the various transactions in a profession which brings the practitioner into immediate contact with all classes of life: to see a prosperous family around him, with children of the third and fourth generation, and to have preserved to the last a cheerfulness and gaiety of manners which old age and the cares of life too frequently chill, are all blessings and enjoyments which fall to the lot of few, but which were obtained by the subject of this memorial, Robert Abraham. T. L.

* As an instance of the high appreciation of benefits derived, and of the affectionate esteem in which Mr. Abraham was held by those who had been professionally educated in his office, it may be mentioned that, in the year 1843, a valuable gold snuff-box, appropriately inscribed, was presented to him by his pupils then practising in London.

STATISTICS OF BUILDING OPERATIVES.

The Builders' Society of London have compiled some tables, with a view to furnish the best answer that could be obtained to the question, "Does the general average of life among the operatives of the building trades run parallel with the general average of all classes, upon the expectancy arising from which the Government Tables for Deferred Annuities have been calculated?" so as to render it advisable for these classes to avail themselves of the provisions of Savings Bank Act, 3 & 4 Wm. 4, cap. 14, and to purchase Deferred Annuities. The tables are necessarily only approximations to truth, and show some singular discrepancies, but will nevertheless be found valuable. We reprint some of them.

Table showing Rate per Cent. of Mortality of the Building Operative Class in comparison with General Average of Mortality among all Classes.

Ages.	Average of 2,400 Lives: Bricklayers, Carpenters, &c.	General Average of all Classes, 11,705 Lives.
Under 25	4·0	6·7
25 to 30	7·4	7·3
30 to 35	8·3	7·9
35 to 40	9·5	9·2
40 to 45	11·	9·4
45 to 50	10·3	8·9
	51·4	49·4
50 to 55	9·6	8·9
55 to 60	9·5	8·
60 to 65	8·8	8·7
65 to 70	8·2	8·1
70 to 75	6·	6·7
75 to 80	3·6	6·1
Upwards of 80	2·7	4·1

Table showing Rate per Cent. of the Ages of Building Operatives *absolutely at work*, compiled from the Returns of 23 Master Builders. Aggregate number returned, 4,804 Men.

	AGES.					
	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 55	55 to 60	Above 60
Rates per cent.	32·2	42·5	19·5	0·6	0·9	0·3

From the Abstracts the following information is deduced:—

Out of 369 bricklayers, 9 (*i. e.* 1 *in* 41 attained 80 years and upwards: the following appear the ages	1 to 80 Yrs.	2 to 81 ..	3 to 83 ..	1 to 86 ..	1 to 90 .. 1 to 99
Ditto 162 masons, 2 (*i.e.* 1 *in* 82), do.	1 to 82 do.	1 to 85			
Ditto 163 plasterers, 5 (*i. e.* 1 *in* 33), do.	1 to 82 do.	1 to 83 ..	1 to 84 ..	1 to 85 ..	1 to 88
Ditto 870 carpenters and joiners, 53 (*i.e.* 1 *in* 16), do.	15 to 80 do.	3 to 81 ..	8 to 82 ..	3 to 83 ..	4 to 84 .. 4 to 85
	1 to 86 do.	1 to 87 ..	4 to 88 ..	1 to 89 ..	3 to 90 .. 3 to 91
	1 to 92 do.	1 to 94 ..	1 to 96		
Ditto 370 smiths and engineers, 6 (*i.e.* 1 *in* 62), do.	2 to 80 do.	1 to 85 ..	1 to 87 ..	1 to 90 ..	1 to 92
Ditto 180 plumbers, 1 (*i. e.* 1 *in* 118), do.	1 to 82				
Ditto 348 painters and glaziers, 3 (*i. e.* 1 *in* 116), do.	1 to 81 do.	1 to 83 ..	1 to 84		

AN ARCHITECTURAL TRIP IN BELGIUM.

Having within the last month made a tour through the principal cities of Belgium, I have to offer a few notices on the architectural works in progress, or recently completed.

At Ostend, a new custom-house, for examining travellers' baggage, has been erected on the quay, close by where the steam-boats bring up for disembarkation. The upper floor of this building, called the "*Salle d'Attente*," is occupied by an excellent coffee-room, with every convenience for refreshment, cleanliness of person after the voyage, and remaining until the trains are ready to depart; making it unnecessary for any traveller who wishes to proceed onwards, to avail himself of hotel accommodation.

Bruges remains nearly in its usual inanimate condition. One of the fine old spacious houses in the Rue de Flandre has been deprived of its massive and mediæval character, by the ruthless hand of the modernizers, in spite of the reclamations of all the antiquaries of the city. "The Salle" of St. George has had the characteristic doorway, with its ogee-arched top and fleurons, cut away to make a larger opening into a flat lintel. The beautiful iron work on it, engraved in The Builder some time since, has disappeared. The chapel of St. Sang is the only edifice that offers any evidence of care. The new stained glass windows are now completed and placed. The wall of the tribune, or the side chapel, where the phial containing the miraculous fluid is offered to the lips of the devout every Friday, has been painted in rich ornamental pattern, with a profusion of gilding. The design is in harmony with the epoch of the erection of the edifice, A.D. 1150. The chapel itself is in process of internal decoration, of a more enriched design, in which the surface is panelled into lozenge forms, on a large scale, each filled into a kind of heraldic pine-apple. Some of the windows of the singular staircase which leads up to the chapel have been filled with a very good collection of ancient stained glass, formed of small circular pictures.

The new railway station at Ghent is now completed. It consists of two long parallel ranges of offices built with what is called in Belgium, "*Pierre Bleue*;" between which the roof spans the space where the trains arrive and depart. The ends of each range of building are of very bold and massive character, reminding one strongly of Rubens's designs for arches and portals, as seen in his sketches and pictures. Thus they possess a kind of national type to those who are acquainted with the works of the great Flemish painters. The cast-iron columns and brackets for the lamps are of very tasteful design and ornamentation: the pediments of the roofing are also of cast-iron, of a very ingeniously interlaced pattern richly combined. In the city itself no change is apparent. The "*Beffroi*" is denuded of the famous dragon, which surmounted it as a vane, said to have been

* *i. e.* 96 per cent. of the number of men at work are under 60 years of age.

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